

## Parks, Greenways and Trails System Plan

The parks, trails and greenway system is a major investment for Eau Claire and a vital element of its quality of life. Eau Claire is proud of its long history of providing parks in every residential neighborhood, along with specialized athletic facilities that serve broader areas. And, because the City is blessed with both the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, waterfront public access has been emphasized for a century. Now that those streams are used much less for industry than they were decades ago, parks and other public land uses have become more appropriate riverfront land uses.

This *Plan* is a minor mid-course correction and reaffirmation, since it continues a long program of planning, programming, and capital improvements. The 2005 *Comprehensive Plan* recommended several locations for new parks, improvements and subsequent 5-year Park Plans presented detailed lists of projects in priority to address deficiencies. This chapter will confirm a broad course of action and coordinate major park investments with other plan elements such as the Land Use Plan chapter.

Eau Claire faces challenges to the management of its park system on two fronts: first, to improve or maintain what it already has and, secondly, to provide new parks for established or future neighborhoods. At the same time, the City wishes to extend its system of off-road paths and improve its stewardship of the natural resources that exist in parks and other public open spaces.

### Major Issues in Parks, Greenways and Trails

- 1. Parks in New Neighborhoods:** Should the City continue to create a 5- to 10-acre playground in each new neighborhood (about 4,000 residents), or should there be fewer but larger playgrounds?
- 2. Parks in Established Neighborhoods:** What should the City do, if anything, to improve park access in established neighborhoods?
- 3. Riverfront Parks:** How aggressive should the City be in acquiring land and/or easements to extend the park system along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers? To what extent should the City strive to provide or require public access to the riverfront during property redevelopment? What should be the balance between public access and private control? Should additional riverfront park land be created by acquiring additional properties between the Eau Claire River and East Grand Avenue between Downtown and Boyd Park?
- 4. Balance of Park Size and Type in All Areas of the City:** What should the City do, if anything, to ensure that residents of older neighborhoods have the same access to playgrounds and athletic fields as do the residents of newer neighborhoods, and that newer neighborhoods have easy walking access to visually attractive parks?
- 5. The Role of Parks in Urban Design:** Should the City make a conscious effort to use parks, greenways and parkways to enhance residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect local cultural heritage and honor civic life? Should there be more gardens in the parks?

6. **Park Land Acquisition:** Is the present system of acquiring land for future parks adequate?
7. **The Number of Full-Service Playgrounds:** Should the City reduce the number of playgrounds at which it provides a full complement of facilities and programs?
8. **Ecological Stewardship:** Should portions of the park system be managed for water quality, wildlife habitat, protection of sensitive features and/or natural interpretation?
9. **Funding:** What is the best means to fund trail reconstruction, new play equipment, stadium renovations and life guards at Half Moon Beach? Should the City bond for these improvements? What is the role of parks in aiding tourism and improved sports facilities in Eau Claire? Can room tax dollars fund these improvements?

## **Goal and Objectives**

### **Goal**

**Continue to expand the park system into new neighborhoods while improving the conditions in the older parks.**

#### **Objective 1 – New Parks**

Plan, acquire, and develop additional parks to help meet the outdoor recreation needs of the community's population, protect environmentally sensitive areas, provide sites for environmental education and improve urban design.

#### **Objective 2 – Park Improvements and Maintenance**

Continue to improve existing parks and greenways so they meet current recreation needs, are visually appealing and sustain the natural environment.

#### **Objective 3 – Waterfront Access and Trails**

Improve public enjoyment of rivers and streams in Eau Claire by creating new park land, acquiring easements for access and protection of open space, and linking existing parks with paths where possible.

#### **Objective 4 – Bicycling and Walking**

Link paths in City park land with on- and off-street facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians.

#### **Objective 5 – Role of Parks in Urban Design**

Locate and design parks, greenways and parkways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire's cultural heritage and honor civic life.

#### **Objective 6 – Ecology and Environment**

Plan and design parks and greenways to protect environmentally sensitive features, reduce negative environmental effects and serve as models of land stewardship.

**Objective 7 – City-Wide Facilities and Recreation Programs**

Refine park system facilities and recreation programs to meet changing outdoor recreation needs, meet safety and access guidelines, and achieve other objectives of this Plan.

**Objective 8 – Other Community Recreational Facilities**

Work cooperatively with other communities, units of government, landowners or recreation providers to reduce costs and enhance the delivery of outdoor recreational facilities.

## Parks System Policies

### Objective 1 – New Parks

**Plan, acquire, and develop additional parks to help meet the outdoor recreation needs of the community's population, protect environmentally sensitive areas, provide environmental education and improve urban design.**

Several new park sites are proposed in conjunction with the plan for future land use and the forecast growth of households and population.

### Policies

#### 1. Park Classifications

Use the following park classifications when planning for and maintaining the City parks system:

- Play Lot
- Neighborhood Park or Playground
- Community Park
- Community Athletic Field
- Special Area
- Urban Park
- Waterfront Park

The major characteristics of each type of park, including the primary group served, the service area, desirable size, ideal location, and typical facilities and features are listed in Table 5-1, Eau Claire Guidelines for Park and Recreation Open Space Planning.

The municipal park and open space standards contained within this *Plan* should be used as flexible guidelines to determine open space and facility needs.

Two changes in classification and terminology are recommended:

- The **Waterfront Park** classification has been created to separate linear parks along the rivers, creeks or lake from what were formerly called Special Area Parks. This change reflects the growing number and importance of these features.
- The **Street Island** classification has been deleted. Nevertheless, those properties are still owned by the City.

All of the City's current parks and trails are mapped and listed by classification in the Parks, Greenways and Trails Assessment chapter of this plan.

**Table 5-1**  
**Eau Claire Guidelines for Park and Recreation Open Space Planning**

|                                        | <b>Group Served</b>                                    | <b>Acres per 1,000 people</b>                                       | <b>Service Area</b>                | <b>Desirable Size</b>                     | <b>Location</b>                                                                                                                                 | <b>Facilities and Features</b>                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Playlot</b>                         | Pre-school children                                    | Special facility for higher-density housing                         | 1 to 4 blocks                      | No standard. Usually less than 1/4 acre.  | High-density neighborhood that lacks private yards. Interior of residential block or housing development or in corner of neighborhood park.     | Sandbox, swings, slides, climbing structures, benches, open shelter, fences, paved and grass areas.                                                                                             |
| <b>Neighborhood Park or Playground</b> | Neighborhood surrounding the playground (for all ages) | 2 acres per 1,000 persons depending on neighborhood characteristics | 1/2 mile radius from playgrounds   | 5 to 15 acres minimum                     | Near intensely developed areas and areas of high density. Preferably at or adjoining an elementary school. Should be accessible by pedestrians. | Play apparatus area, multi-purpose athletic field, shelter building, skating rinks, organized summer playground program offered. Quiet or passive areas and activities should also be provided. |
| <b>Community Park</b>                  | Entire community (all ages)                            | 5 acres per 1,000 residents                                         | Area within 20 minutes travel time | 25 acres minimum; 50+ acres desirable.    | Where appropriate sites can be obtained incorporating scenic or other natural features. Should be along collector or arterial streets.          | Active athletic areas similar to playfield but at least 1/2 should be rustic and provide picnicking, hiking, fishing, boating, etc. Shelters, swimming pools and quiet areas are desirable.     |
| <b>Community Athletic Fields</b>       | Entire community (all ages)                            |                                                                     | No specific service area           | Depends on the types of fields            | A site with good road access                                                                                                                    | Major complexes for such sports as soccer, softball, baseball, etc.                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Special Area</b>                    | Entire community                                       | Not applicable                                                      | No specific service area           | Depends on type of facility               | Depends on type of facility.                                                                                                                    | Hockey, swimming, archery, skiing, sledding, bike-ped paths, overlooks.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Urban Park</b>                      | All ages                                               | Not applicable                                                      | Neighborhood                       | 2 acres                                   | High density neighborhood                                                                                                                       | Seating and strolling, benches, trees, views, plaza.                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Waterfront Park</b>                 | Entire community                                       | Not applicable                                                      | No specific service area           | Minimum width 25 feet; no minimum length. | Along lake or river shoreline                                                                                                                   | Bicycle and pedestrian trails, benches, look-outs, picnic areas. Physical and visual access to the water.                                                                                       |
| <b>Greenway</b>                        | Entire community                                       | Not applicable                                                      | Entire community                   | Minimum width 25 feet                     | Off-road; former railroad lines; waterfronts; natural areas; link parks                                                                         | Landscaped open land; 10 to 14 foot multi-use paved path                                                                                                                                        |

## 2. Planned New Parks and Greenways

Acquire land for new parks and trails in the approximate locations and sizes illustrated by Figure 5-1, Parks and Greenway Plan, and listed in Table 5-2, Existing and Planned Parks and Greenways and School Playground sites.

### New Park Locations

- **Perimeter Locations:** Six new Neighborhood Parks are proposed in perimeter locations along with two new park-school sites. On Figure 5-1, see the parks numbered:

81 Gateway Drive Neighborhood Park

85 Union Park-School Site (the location is yet to be determined)

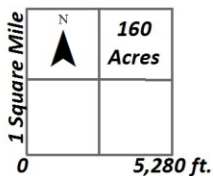
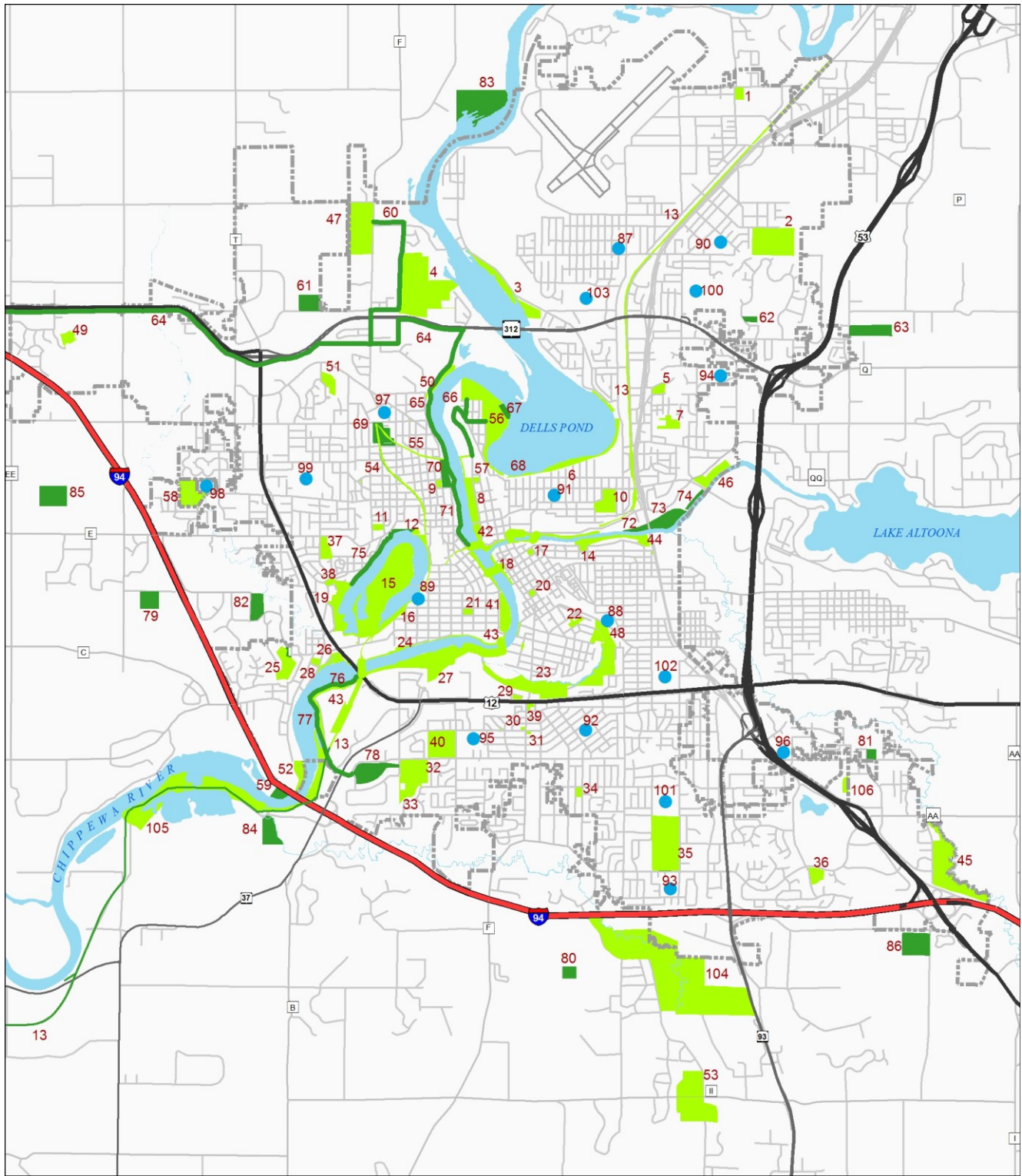
86 Washington Park-School Site (near Old Town Hall and Graff Roads)

Also proposed is a future Chippewa River Waterfront Park near 80<sup>th</sup> Street in the current Town of Wheaton.

- **Folsom Street Park:** One new Neighborhood Playground is proposed between Folsom and Bolles Streets, just south of Roosevelt Elementary School, where two new bicycle paths intersect. (Numbered 69 on Figure 5-1.) This neighborhood has a shortage of park space and is nearly fully developed. The neighborhood supports open space area rather than a park at this time, letter was received in December 2021.
- **Greenways:** Additional Greenways with trails are planned along both the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers. Another greenway trail is proposed along the Xcel power line and Highway 312.

### Additional Future Considerations or Initiatives

- **Older Neighborhoods:** Seek to acquire and improve additional land for Play Lots or Neighborhoods Parks within the ring of Clairemont Avenue, Highway 312 and Hastings Way, where a shortage exists.
- **Sherman Creek Park:** Negotiate with the Town of Union to make Sherman Creek Park jointly accessible for Town and City residents.
- **Taft-Kay Stormwater Area:** In the future, consider using the Taft-Kay surface water management site as an informal neighborhood park.



- Existing Parks
- Planned Parks
- School Recreation Sites
- Existing Greenway
- Planned Greenway

**Figure 5-1**  
**Parks and**  
**Greenways Plan**



City of Eau Claire **5-8** Comprehensive Plan



Park

- 84 Brunswick Park

**School Playground and Open Space Sites –  
Planned**

- 85 School-Park Site West
- 86 School Park Site Southeast

**School Playground and Open Space Sites –  
Existing**

- 87 Davey Elementary School
- 88 Flynn Elementary School
- 89 Lakeshore Elementary School
- 90 Locust Lane Elementary School
- 91 Longfellow Elementary School
- 92 Manz Elementary School
- 93 Meadowview Elementary School
- 94 Northwoods Elementary School
- 95 Putnam Heights School
- 96 Robbins Elementary School
- 97 Roosevelt Elementary School
- 98 Sherman Elementary School
- 99 DeLong Middle School
- 100 Northstar Middle School
- 101 South Middle School
- 102 Memorial High School Fields
- 103 North High School Fields

**County Parks**

- 104 Lowes Creek County Park

**State Open Space**

- 105 DNR State Trail Open Space

**Town Parks**

- 106 Horlacher Fields (Town of Washington)

### 3. Park Acquisition, Programming and Development

Develop new parks consistent with the recommendations shown in Table 5-3, Development Program for the Planned Parks.

Adjust the facility locations, sizes and configurations shown by Figure 5-1 during the acquisition process.

The means of acquiring future park land should be according to Policy 3, below.

Negotiate with landowners and developers to specify the location and configuration of each park with the aim of acquiring the approximate amount of land indicated by Table 5-3, Development Program for the Planned Parks, and satisfying the area needed to accommodate the planned facilities. Negotiate also the street access, the length of public street abutting each park and the relationship to adjacent buildings in that process.

**Table 5-3  
Development Program for the Planned Parks**

| Reference Number | Reference Name               | Classification    | Acreage or Length | Recommended Components                      |
|------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>60</b>        | Northwest                    | Greenway          | 20 acres          | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>61</b>        | Prairie Lane                 | Neighborhood Park | 15 acres          | Neighborhood Park components (see footnote) |
| <b>62</b>        | Princeton                    | Neighborhood Park | 7 acres           | Neighborhood Park components                |
| <b>63</b>        | Peterson Avenue              | Neighborhood Park | 20 acres          | Neighborhood Park components                |
| <b>64</b>        | Xcel Corridor                | Greenway          | 6 miles           | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>65</b>        | Upper Chippewa River         | Greenway          | 1 mile            | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>66</b>        | Trail link to Mt. Simon Park | Greenway          | 0.5 mile          | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>67</b>        | Addition to Mt. Simon Park   | Community Park    | 10 acres          | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>68</b>        | Dells Pond Addition          | Greenway          | 1 acre            | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>69</b>        | Folsom Street                | Neighborhood Park | 12 acres          | Neighborhood Park components                |
| <b>70</b>        | West Riverside               | Neighborhood Park | 4 acres           | Neighborhood Park components                |
| <b>71</b>        | West Riverside               | Greenway          | 1 mile            | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>72</b>        | Eau Claire River             | Greenway          | 0.5 mile          | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>73</b>        | Eau Claire River             | Greenway          | 0.5 mile          | Paved path and open space                   |
| <b>74</b>        | Eau Claire River             | Greenway          | 0.25 mile         | Paved path and open space                   |

| <b>Reference Number</b> | <b>Reference Name</b>              | <b>Classification</b> | <b>Acreage or Length</b> | <b>Recommended Components</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>75</b>               | Half Moon Lake                     | Greenway              | 1 mile                   | Paved path and open space     |
| <b>76</b>               | Lower Chippewa River               | Greenway              | 0.5 mile                 | Paved path and open space     |
| <b>77</b>               | Lower Chippewa River and Short St. | Greenway              | 0.75 mile                | Paved path and open space     |
| <b>78</b>               | Neighborhood Park                  | Neighborhood Park     | 10 acres                 | Neighborhood Park components  |
| <b>79</b>               | Neighborhood Park                  | Neighborhood Park     | 10 acres                 | Neighborhood Park components  |
| <b>80</b>               | School-Park Site West              | School Playground     | 5 acres                  | Neighborhood Park components  |
| <b>81</b>               | School Park Site Southeast         | School Playground     | 5 acres                  | Neighborhood Park components  |

#### **Neighborhood Park Components**

- Open play area
- Play equipment
- Basketball court
- Picnic shelter

#### **4. Number and Size of Neighborhood Parks**

Site future Neighborhood Parks in neighborhoods where parks deficiencies exist.

Encourage smaller parks or play lots within private land developments and homeowners associations.

#### **5. Coordinating Locations for New Park Sites**

Attempt to locate neighborhood playgrounds not associated with a school near the middle of a defined residential service area rather than near its edge along an arterial road.

Site new parks in coordination with school sites and the City's long-range development plan for major surface water ponds.

Some efficiency in land acquisition, grading and site development may be gained by siting these park and school facilities together on one large tract of land rather than on smaller individual parcels. It is important that the amount of land needed for a particular park site is not sacrificed in combining such multi-use areas.

#### **6. Means of Acquiring Land for Parks and Greenways**

Consider adopting a City ordinance requiring that some combination of land and/or cash be dedicated by anyone subdividing property, with such land or money being applied to parkland acquisition and/or park improvements. Thus, land for future parks would be acquired during the platting process. Earmark cash given during subdivision for land acquisition or improvements in or near the area from which it came.

If the land dedication process is not sufficient to acquire sites of sufficient size and quality as recommended by this *Plan*, then the City will use general funds to acquire additional property. Donating lands for park needs should also be encouraged.

Attempt to acquire land for new neighborhood parks before the vicinity is platted if possible. This may be done by identifying specific sites and acquiring land using general funds or bond proceeds. Alternatively, such lands should be acquired during the platting process using the proposed new parkland or cash dedication ordinance. In either case, it will be important to determine the approximate location, size and facilities desired for each park so that the City can act decisively and wisely when an opportunity presents itself.

It is judged appropriate to require land developers to dedicate land or money during the platting process because those resources will go to create neighborhood playgrounds that will benefit the residents who ultimately bear those costs. This is considered more equitable than requiring people all across the City to pay for a new neighborhood park that might not benefit them. On the other hand, the large community athletic fields and special use parks, which have City-wide benefit, ought to be financed through the general fund.

## **7. Components of Future Neighborhood Parks**

Design and build new neighborhood parks with these basic components:

- Multi-purpose open play area
- Children's play equipment
- Basketball court
- Picnic shelter

Additional elements may be added at later times depending on identified neighborhood or wider district needs, and the availability of funding.

Summer playground programs and ice-skating rinks will not be provided at every neighborhood parks site. Instead, they will be provided at sites having a larger service areas.

## **8. Waterfront Parks**

Continue to extend public parks, plazas, trails and overlooks along the Chippewa River and along the Eau Claire River from Haymarket Plaza to the River Prairie area in to Altoona. In some locations, existing development may make this impossible in the foreseeable future, but redeveloped sites should include some public access along the waterfront.

## Objective 2 – Park Improvements and Maintenance

### Continue to improve existing parks and greenways so they meet current recreation needs, are visually appealing, and sustain the natural environment.

Many recent improvements have been made to Eau Claire’s parks and recreational facilities; however, some deficiencies still exist. The challenge will be to sustain an adequate renewal effort during periods of budgetary retrenchment.

#### Policies

##### 1. Five-Year Improvements Plan

Continue the process of preparing and updating the City’s five-year *Park and Open Space Plan*, which lists specific actions to improve individual parks. Included with each five-year plan are an updated list, map and description of the parks in the system. Each five-year plan is drafted by the City staff and reviewed and adjusted by the Waterways and Parks Commission.

The five-year plans are based on the *Comprehensive Plan* and a detailed review of the current conditions, usage and trends of the parks.

The criteria used to **identify** and **rank** priority improvement projects are:

- **Coordination:** Does the improvement coordinate well with other work currently committed for or recently accomplished at that park?
- **Physical Need:** What is the physical condition of the facility relative to other needs in the system? Is there a safety hazard?
- **Service Deficiencies:** How seriously deficient is the park system relative to that type of facility?
- **Neighborhood or District Planning:** How well would the improvement add to an overall improvement campaign in that neighborhood or district? Is it supported by a neighborhood plan?
- **Geographic Balance:** Would the improvement help to balance parks spending across the City in that year?
- **Funding Source:** Are special sources of funding available for certain areas of the City or for certain projects (e.g., Federal Community Development Block Grant funds in neighborhoods with low- and moderate-household incomes, lake improvement funds from the DNR)?

The **timing** of these projects depends on:

- The availability of funding from the City’s general fund;
- The availability of grant funds for particular projects;
- The timing of other capital improvement projects near a park;
- The timing and availability of private funds;
- Changes in recreational demands and needs;
- Opportunities to consolidate bidding to reduce costs.

The priority and scheduling for the projects is to be evaluated annually using these factors as the City prepares its annual five-year capital improvement program.

## **2. Land Acquisitions included in the 2018 – 2022 Park and Open Space Plan**

Pursue these land acquisitions as recommended in the 2018 to 2022 *Park and Open Space Plan*:

- The houses southeast of hockey rink at **Roosevelt Playground**
- Land for a trail on the south side of **Chippewa River** from the University property west to Clairemont Avenue
- The remaining two residential properties abutting lower **Mount Simon Park** area
- Any remaining properties necessary for a continuous trail along the northern side of the **Eau Claire River**
- The **Half Moon Lake** shoreline as needed to complete a trail around the lake – may be acquired in fee or as an easement
- Houses east of **First Avenue** from Fulton to Randall Street as recommended in the *West Riverside Neighborhood Plan*.
- Neighborhood Park near **Gateway Drive**
- Neighborhood Park near **Sherman School**
- Land or easement, for trail on the south side of the Eau Claire River from S. Hastings Way to River Prairie.

## **3. Other System-Wide Improvements**

- Improve **lighting** at parks and trails to increase use during winter
- Encourage residents to use parks through **signs**, classes and demonstrations
- Continue to implement the park **signage** plan
- Provide infrastructure for new **community gardens**.

## **4. Cooperative Effort**

Investigate additional opportunities to coordinate park improvements and maintenance with the Eau Claire Area School District, counties, towns and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

### **Objective 3 – Waterfront Access**

**Improve public enjoyment of rivers and streams in Eau Claire by creating new riparian park land, by acquiring easements for access and protection of open space, and by linking existing parks with paths where possible.**

Eau Claire has 32 miles of waterfront, including the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, and Half Moon Lake. For the sake of quality of life, economic development, property values and environmental protection, the community owes it to itself to line these water bodies with nearly continuous public open space.

The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, Half Moon Lake and numerous creeks such as Otter, Sherman and Lowes are integral components of the form and image of Eau Claire and provide open space and recreation. In addition, the natural beauty of the community's scenic vistas, hills and valleys are in large part a result of these waterways. Because of their importance, the aim goal of the City is to protect these resources and provide public access to and along these waterfront areas.

#### **Policies**

##### **1. Waterfront Linear Parks**

Seek to acquire land in the form of continuous linear open space corridors called greenways along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers, Dells Pond, Half Moon Lake, and portions of Otter Creek and Sherman Creek.

Continue to implement the recommendations of the 2012 *Waterways Plan*, which recommends where to acquire waterfront land. Of particular importance is the opportunity to create a continuous greenway along the northern side of the Eau Claire River and a connection of the south sides of the Eau Claire River to River Prairie.

The Otter Creek corridor between the Eau Claire River and Southeast Community Park also has untapped potential, and that effort should be coordinated with the City of Altoona.

##### **2. Half Moon Lake**

Continue to acquire properties around Half Moon Lake as they become available until a continuous strip of land is owned by the City and a path can be looped around the lake.



### **3. The Sonnentag Event and Recreation Center**

Work with the University to develop the County Materials site in a way that enhances the adjacent greenway and Chippewa Valley State Trail. Additional open land along the trail would be helpful, and the new building should both complement and benefit from the greenway and the path.

### **4. Walking and Bicycling**

Build paths for walking and bicycling in the riverfront greenways where conditions permit. Take care to protect the ecological integrity of the flood plains, wetlands and steep slopes. In some locations, include benches, overlooks and occasional larger park nodes. Link waterfront paths to the City-wide route network via other paths or on-street striped bicycling lanes.

Monitor use of the trails and separate bicycle traffic from pedestrian traffic where pedestrian and bicyclist conflicts occur because of traffic levels or design.

### **5. Waterways Plan**

Prior to 2030, update the City's *Waterways Plan*, which was initially prepared in 1988 and updated in 2012.

This update should emphasize the City's commitment to protecting the rivers, creeks and lake, to providing public access to and along waterfronts, and to encouraging only that development that enhances the attractiveness of the waterways and is sensitive to waterways environmental issues. The list of needed improvement projects should be refreshed.

## **Objective 4 – Bicycling and Walking Network**

### **Link paths in City park land with on- and off-street facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians.**

This objective focuses on the off-road system of paths and trails that primarily extend through the City's waterfronts linear parks and Community Parks. However, other important components of the overall bicycling and walking systems are the paved paths along arterial roads (e.g. Hastings Way), the on-street striped bicycle lanes and the sidewalks; all of those are addressed in more detail in the Transportation Plan chapter.

Although bicycle paths along streets or on-street striped bicycle lanes are not traditionally considered part of the City's park system, they do provide outdoor recreation and provide a means to access the parks. It is important to recognize that in developing a city-wide network for bicycling, both components must be considered in planning the overall system.

### **Policies**

#### **1. Park Access**

Improve access to the parks and waterfront greenways by linking them with off-road paths and on-street striped bicycling lanes.

Recent neighborhood or district plans have emphasized improved sidewalks and bicycling lanes through the neighborhood to linear riverfront parks to enhance the actual and perceived connections and extend the waterfront benefits deeper into the neighborhood. Refer to the plans for the Randall Park, West Riverside, East Side Hill, Third Ward, and North Riverfronts neighborhoods and the Clairemont Educational and Medical District. More recommendations are found in the Safe Routes to Park Plan improve accessibility to each park.

#### **2. Bicycling and Walking Networks**

Expand the system of off-road multiple-use paths as shown by Figure 5-2, Greenway and Trail System Plan. These paved paths may either be along former railroad rights-of-way, through linear parks known as greenways, within road rights-of-way or within future residential neighborhoods through the purchase or dedication of park land. If along roads, the paths may be physically separate from the road, on wide road shoulders or striped as on-road lanes.

Continue to build the facilities recommended by the 2018 *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*. Integrate off-road paths with on-road striped lanes to create a city-wide bicycling network for transportation and recreation. Ensure that future residential streets are interconnected for the benefits of bicyclists, pedestrians and motorists. Continue to seek advice from the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, a group of citizens appointed by the City Council.

#### **3. Major Greenway Initiatives**

##### **Creating the Northwest Greenway**

Build multi-use paths and bike lanes that link Jeffers Road Fields, Northwest

Community Park, Dells Pond, Domer Park, the planned Cannary and the Chippewa Valley State Trail. A section of the trail should also be considered west along Highway 312 to the City limits and south along Kane Road.

Some of this system will be on land owned by Xcel Energy for its power lines, which will require negotiating easements and related agreements. Locating the path along Xcel Energy power lines offers the opportunity for it to meander through open settings.

### **Completing the Eau Claire River Greenway**

The City owns nearly all of the land it needs to build a continuous riverfront path along the northern bank from the confluence to the eastern City border. The next task will be to improve the land as park and build the path(s), which should be budgeted through upcoming capital improvement programs.

The path along the southern bank from Haymarket Plaza to S. Hastings Way should be studied.

Also, a trail connection further east to River Prairie should be studied.

### **Linking the High Bridge to the Chippewa Valley State Trail**

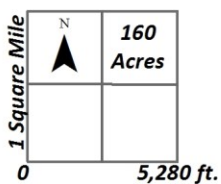
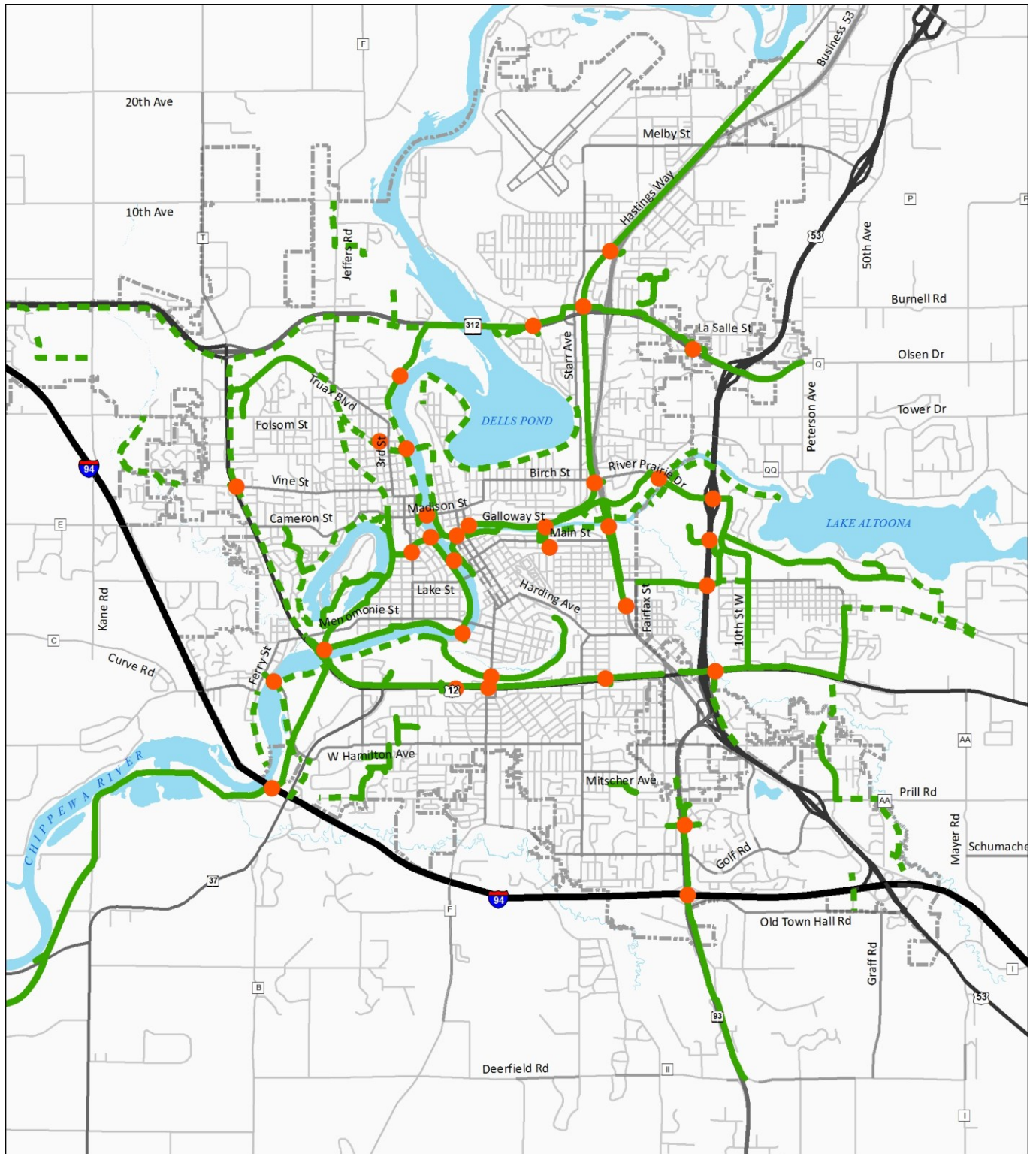
Create a safe on-street bicycling route linking the High Bridge path, Mt. Simon Park, McDonough Park and the Chippewa Valley State Trail near Starr Avenue. Extend the route south to connect Forest Street and Phoenix Parks.

Use Forest Street, Sheridan Road and Omaha Street. Widen Forest Street under the Union Pacific Railroad bridge when that structure is eventually rebuilt; presently, that passage is narrow and hazardous.

The previously planned scheme to build a continuous waterfront path among those points is probably not feasible because of land ownership and topographic limitations. Refer to Figures 5-14 and 5-15 in the Transportation Assessment chapter or Figure 7-5 in the Parks Assessment for depictions of the waterfront alignment.

### **The Lower Chippewa River Greenway**

Follow the guidance of the parks element of the *Waterways Plan*, page 30, as it pertains to riverfront greenways and paths between the Clairemont Avenue and I-94 bridges. That plan recommended maintaining the current route of the Chippewa River State Trail and/or negotiating space for a riverfront greenway and path during the redevelopment process. That change is not expected to occur for several decades, however.



- Existing Off-Street Path
- - - Proposed Off-Street Path
- Grade Separated Facility

**Figure 5-2**  
**Greenway and**  
**Trail System Plan**

## **Objective 5 – The Role of Parks in Urban Design**

**Locate and design parks, greenways, and parkways to enhance the quality of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts, reflect Eau Claire’s cultural heritage and honor civic life.**

Parks are a major and highly visible public investment that can have a significant positive effect on the appearance of a community and its quality of life. Eau Claire has several fine examples of how parks and greenways can be used to improve or sustain nearby private investment. This objective recommends ways that existing or future parks should be used to help create better neighborhoods, promote revitalization and build an attractive, urban community.

### **Policies**

#### **1. A Network of Green Spaces**

Continue to build a system of green open spaces for recreation, urban beauty and natural protection that are linked by linear parks (greenways), off-road paths and on-street bicycle lanes, and generously landscaped roads known as parkways. This theme runs throughout the plan.

#### **2. A System of Civic Spaces**

Incorporate the design of the City park and greenway system as one element of a larger system of civic spaces. Through a high quality of design and stewardship, key civic spaces will sustain the quality of life, private investment and economic competitiveness of Eau Claire. The system elements should be designed to complement one another both visually and functionally, and should be interconnected for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Other elements of this system include:

- Parks of all types
- Plazas
- Schools
- Civic buildings, such as City Hall and the library
- The university and technical college campuses
- Local residential streets, sidewalks and street trees
- Minor arterial or collector roads
- Bridges
- Off-street and on-street bicycle lanes
- Wetlands and ponds
- Rivers and streams
- Wooded areas

### **3. Neighborhood Quality**

Seek to design parks, greenways, and parkways as visual assets that should enhance the level of private investment in nearby housing and create lasting value in neighborhoods. Each park should:

- Be open to the neighborhood on at least half of its perimeter;
- Include generous landscaping to soften and direct views;
- Provide both active spaces and quiet, natural areas;
- Use a civic building such as a gazebo or picnic shelter as a focal point;
- Be designed in school-park situations in coordination with the facilities provided by the school;
- Include off-street parking designed in careful relation to the topography, plantings and views so as to minimize its visual effect. No more off-street parking should be provided than is reasonable in addition to on-street parking.

At the same time, the City should strive to ensure that development that occurs next to parks is compatible with these open space areas.

### **4. Waterfront Public Open Space**

Provide well-designed and accessible public corridors along rivers and streams for public open space and parks. As recommended previously, the City should design the green space to include walkways and bicycling paths, protect key environmental features such as wetlands or flood plains, use environmentally sensitive bank stabilization techniques instead of heavily engineered devices, and create visual and functional linkages between the waterfronts and nearby neighborhoods or districts. In addition, a large portion of the edge of public linear open space should abut local streets rather than private lots in order to extend the benefits of that open space into the larger neighborhood.

### **5. Quiet Spaces**

Include quiet spaces in parks and playgrounds for strolling or sitting wherever the landscape allows. Some locations in the park system should be managed to retain their wooded or otherwise natural characteristics to invite exploration and discovery. Such places offer a small refuge from the bustle of the urban environment and offer opportunities to connect with nature on a daily basis.

### **6. Civic Pride and Local Heritage**

Design and maintain parks and other public spaces as the highest expression of civic pride and local heritage. Parks should be beautiful as well as functional so that current generations will enjoy their use and future generations will appreciate what they represent. Parks and greenways should be inspiring and represent the best of Eau Claire.



## **7. Park Buildings**

Design buildings and facilities in parks to follow a consistent architectural theme reflecting local materials, building practices, cultural heritage and user needs. Buildings should be classic in proportions and materials, adaptable and long lasting. If necessary, it is preferable to delay construction rather than to install a structure that is not of sufficient quality.

## **8. Associated Furnishings and Amenities**

Encourage park furnishings and amenities; such as benches, bicycle parking, fences, park-related signs, and trash containers to complement the design of the park areas and buildings within such parks. Other design features such as art, decorative lighting of buildings and bridges, and other decorative urban design features should be encouraged to further enhance the appearance of the City's park, and greenway areas.

## **9. Development of Adjacent Park and Greenway Areas**

Ensure that development that occurs adjacent to parks and greenways is compatible with such areas, provides appropriate screening, maintains access and does not negatively affect the natural environment of such park or greenway.

The Waterways and Parks Commission currently comments on development proposals that abut a park or open space. The City may consider expanding the Commission's review to include advisory comments on development applications that are adjacent to parks or greenways and only separated by a public right-of-way.



## **Objective 6 – Ecology and Environment**

### **Plan and design parks and greenways to protect environmentally sensitive features, reduce negative environmental effects and serve as models of land stewardship.**

Parks can and should provide benefits in addition to outdoor recreation such as protecting environmentally sensitive areas and connecting people to nature on a daily basis. This section describes several ways that the City will manage its parks and greenways in an ecologically responsible manner while meeting other objectives.

#### **Policies**

##### **1. Natural Preservation and Stewardship**

Identify, preserve, restore or enhance existing valuable natural areas, such as wetlands, major wooded areas, hilltops, and native prairies (if any) and provide for appropriate public use. Identify such lands prior to the neighborhood development process. The City should also establish an inventory of other significant natural resource areas, such as Mt. Tom.

##### **2. Half Moon Lake Water Quality Improvements**

Continue to work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and citizen groups to monitor and improve water quality in Half Moon Lake and its watershed. Much progress has been made since this campaign was begun in 2002 and the Half Moon Lake Water Quality Plan was updated in 2019.

Promote wildlife and fisheries management programs for the Half Moon Lake, Rod and Gun Park and Carson Park areas and their watersheds. Encourage such programs in other appropriate areas within the City.

##### **3. Otter Creek Greenway**

Seek to acquire a strip of land on the east side of Otter Creek opposite the Southeast Community Park to protect that wooded valley beyond the already-protected flood plain. This greenway should be sufficiently wide to buffer the effects of future urban development to the east. This initiative depends on where the Cities of Eau Claire and Altoona negotiate the future boundary between their jurisdictions. If that land is destined to be in Altoona, then that City should acquire the land.

Eau Claire should partner with the City of Altoona to acquire land along one or both sides of Otter Creek between the Eau Claire River and County Trunk Highway AA for use as a greenway. Because some areas along Otter Creek are already divided into small parcels for housing, the Cities will have to act soon to acquire meaningful amounts of creek edge.

##### **4. Manage Drainageways Naturally**

Seek to identify and maintain drainageways in parks in a natural state. Drainage swales and creeks are important for their ability to provide wildlife habitat and movement paths, cost-effectively manage storm water, reduce flooding, and serve as visual amenities. Mowing should be discouraged, and environmentally sensitive

methods of bank protection should be used rather than engineering approaches.

The City will also try to incorporate neighborhood detention ponds into parks for the sake of park aesthetics, water quality and land efficiency. This should be done without losing the amount of land needed for active park uses, however.

#### **5. Use Sustainable Plantings**

Seek to reduce the amount of park area devoted to mowed turf and introduce in its place plant species that require less maintenance, provide habitat for birds, small animals and insects, and improve the quality of water runoff. Invasive, non-native plant species should be controlled.

#### **6. Link Open Spaces**

Link major intact natural areas in public open spaces by corridors of native woods and grasses for the sake of wildlife habitat and movement, and urban aesthetics. Landscape elements that can be used for such links include streams and stream edges, fencerows and hedgerows, drainage swales, roadside ditches with natural vegetation, flood plains and wetlands.

#### **7. Retain Unmanaged Places**

Retain selected few wooded and other natural areas in the park system at a very low level of management in order to provide places for people to explore on their own and experience a rudimentary bit of wilderness.

#### **8. Stewardship Example**

Seek to set a positive example of land stewardship. As the major public landowner within the community, the City should set a good example of land stewardship for the private sector to emulate by following sound principles of sustainable design.

#### **9. Provide Educational Opportunities**

Educate the general public and teach park users about the physical and natural environments existing within the City's parks through the use of interpretive displays, plaques, educational programs, etc. Such efforts should address topics such as vegetation, wildlife, aquatics, and geology as well as highlighting significant historical events associated with a particular park.

#### **10. Work with Other Organizations**

Cooperate with allied organizations (e.g., the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, DNR, Friends of Half Moon Lake, Eau Claire County) that are dedicated to protecting the local natural environment in order to leverage spending and volunteer help, marshal political support, and evaluate resources.

## **Objective 7 – City-Wide Facilities, Programs and Services**

**Refine park system facilities and recreation programs to meet changing outdoor recreation needs, meet safety and access guidelines, and achieve other objectives of this Plan.**

Eau Claire supports similar programs in many locations, so these activities are best addressed on a City-wide basis. The following policies provide recommendations that apply across the community.

### **Policies**

#### **1. Recognize Diverse Needs**

Seek to recognize and accommodate the diverse recreational needs of the community:

- Neighborhood-level recreation facilities should be made available to each household in the City at either a neighborhood park or through the joint use of school properties.
- Facilities provided at sites classified as Neighborhood Parks should reflect the needs of the particular neighborhood or user group within the service area.
- Park and open space facilities should be designed to serve all ages and abilities.
- Use the standards in this plan as flexible guidelines.

#### **2. Citizen Involvement**

Encourage greater citizen involvement in leisure activities and promote greater use of the parks.

Continue to provide a financial assistance program to people who are financially unable to pay for the registration fees for recreation programs sponsored by the City and promote the fact that this assistance is available.

Continue to monitor attendance and participation levels of the programs and parks to help determine demand.

Continue to conduct surveys to assess the needs and deficiencies in programs and facilities.

#### **3. Service Delivery**

Follow the guidance of the 2016 *Parks, Recreation and Forestry Strategic Plan*, which addressed service delivery in the subjects of:

- Customer service
- Ranking services, programs, events and facilities
- Marketing
- Personnel and staffing
- Funding
- Community health and well being
- The environment.

#### **4. Active Aging Facilities**

Work with volunteer groups to develop an active aging program at McDonough Playground Park. Plans have been approved and fund raising is in progress.

#### **5. Carson Park Master Plan**

Follow the guidance and implement the 2021 Carson Park Master Plan.

#### **6. Basketball**

Provide outdoor basketball courts at each neighborhood playground.

#### **7. Disc Golf**

Assess and address community needs for additional disc golf courses. Conduct a site study that includes County as well as City parks.

#### **8. Tennis and Pickleball**

Continue to monitor the needs for additional community tennis courts. There is no need for more tennis courts presently or in the foreseeable future.

Additional pickleball court were constructed at McDonough Park in 2019. Monitor the need for striping existing tennis courts for either tennis or pickle ball use.



A pickleball game on half of a tennis court

#### **9. Community Gardens**

Designate spaces in parks where residents can plant gardens of vegetables or flowers. Consider park master plans, neighborhood and community needs, water access, visibility for security, and appropriateness.

The UW Extension Office reviewed the suitability of the various neighborhood parks for community gardens in 2015. Sites were assessed based on soil quality, sunlight exposure, water access, and available space. Their review indicated that the following parks seem to be best suited for a community garden: Sundet, Newell, Cameron, Buffington, County Farm, and Zephyr Hill.

#### **10. Skate Plaza**

Continue to look at potential locations for several small concrete plazas of 2,000 to 4,000 square feet in various parts of the city for skate parks. Boyd Park is currently being considered for a skate park.

#### **11. Swimming**

Continue to monitor the need for additional or improved outdoor swimming facilities. The outdoor swimming pool and water slides at Fairfax Park are adequate for the City's summer needs within the time frame of this *Plan*, although additional equipment should be studied.

There is also a swimming beach at the northeast end of Half Moon Lake.

#### **12. Boat Launches**

Assess and address community needs for boat launches. The City maintains boat landings at Riverview Park and Mt. Simon Park for access to the Chippewa River and Dells Pond, at Carson Park for access to Half Moon Lake, and behind Hobbs Ice Center for access to the Chippewa River. The Riverview Park boat launch is near capacity on summer weekends. All boat landings are free and open to the public. Trailer parking is available at all sites. No internal combustion engines are allowed on Half Moon Lake.

The City also constructed a boat launch at the south end of Ferry Street in 2020. The boat launch is on the west side of the Chippewa River.

The feasibility of creating a launch should be studied at the Xcel Energy property off Old Wells Road (accessible from the western side of the community). The City should conduct a study of the number of boats that typically use Dells Pond and the upper Chippewa River to determine the boating capacity of this portion of the river, as well as whether any of the semi-submerged logging “booms” should be removed.

### **13. Canoe and Kayak Launches**

Assess and address community needs for canoe and Kayak launches.

Currently, canoes and Kayaks may be put into the Chippewa River, Eau Claire River, and Half Moon Lake from any of the boat launches. Many other locations are available throughout the City, such as at: Phoenix Park, Owen Park and River Prairie.

### **14. Fishing Docks**

Assess and address the community needs for additional fishing docks. The City should consider installing additional fishing docks on Half Moon Lake near the southwest end of the lake, on Dells Pond at Mount Simon Park, and on the Chippewa River at Riverview Park, north of the existing boat launch.

### **15. Winter Activities**

Assess and address the community needs for additional Nordic ski trails. There are City cross-country skiing trails with terrain for beginners in three locations:

- City Wells Area (flat trail, approximately 3 miles)
- Carson Park (rolling terrain with 1 hill, approximately 1 mile)
- Fairfax Park (fairly flat trail, approximately 1.7 miles).

More extensive Nordic skiing trails are located in four of the Eau Claire County Parks, particularly Tower Ridge Recreation Area, located in the Town of Seymour.

### **16. Artificial Turf Fields**

Investigate the increased use of the new, long-blade artificial turf on select, premier fields for soccer, football, baseball, and softball.

The cost of artificial turf is decreasing, in some cases making it more affordable and efficient than natural grass. Schools and park systems are beginning to find this to be a cost-effective investment over the long-term for certain fields because

of decreased maintenance and increased use. If the City can find other organizations with which to share in the cost, and, perhaps, increased sources of revenue, then the decision to change surfaces could be made on a case-by-case basis. The Carson Park stadium is a prime candidate for an artificial turf field.

#### **17. Dog Parks**

The City currently has three dog parks (southeast and southwest community parks and Sundet Park). Study the feasibility of additional (possibly smaller) dog park locations in the City.

#### **18. Summer Playground Program**

Continue to provide the City-sponsored summer playground program. Since, this program is not offered in each neighborhood or at each neighborhood playground, the City will regularly assess neighborhood needs and demand for this program in order to direct program offerings to the areas experiencing the greatest need. However, in selecting summer playground sites, the City will also consider site location on a City-wide basis in order to afford all interested youth the opportunity to participate in the program. In addition, identify and secure funding sources to assist in providing this program at the neighborhood playgrounds.

## **Objective 8 – Other Community Recreational Facilities**

**Work cooperatively with other communities, units of government, landowners or recreation providers to reduce costs and enhance the delivery of outdoor recreational facilities.**

### **Policies**

#### **1. Reduce Costs to the City**

Seek to reduce the proportion of park costs borne by the City through these means:

- Promote the development of those parks where the beneficiaries donate time or money.
- Use state or federal aid to acquire and develop facilities.
- Promote joint public-private ventures in creating parks.
- When appropriate, plan the park system in cooperation with the county, the school district or the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire to enable its joint design, development and operation for the mutual benefit of recreation and education programs.
- Consider maintenance when designing facilities.
- Encourage the formation of “friends” groups that can assist park improvement, maintenance or funding.

#### **2. Cooperative Relationships**

Seek cooperative and cost-effective relationships with other units of government in the delivery of recreation facilities and programs. Those units include Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties, the Eau Claire Area School District, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, City of Altoona, adjoining towns, and private sports associations and user groups. The aim will be to avoid duplication and counterproductive competition, while communicating and planning cooperatively.

#### **3. Planned Lower Chippewa River Park**

Support the acquisition and development of a new community park along the lower Chippewa River (south of I-94) by Eau Claire County. This site is in the Town of Brunswick and could serve regional recreation needs such as boating, fishing, hiking, picnicking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and nature study; it would also provide flood storage.

Extensive reforestation would be required for this long-term project, as the site has been recently mined for gravel and inundated over the centuries by floods.

Assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources should be sought for that work.

#### **4. Otter Creek Greenway**

Pursue the acquisition and joint management of a greenway and trail along Otter Creek. The land needed for the greenway and trail is currently located in the Cities of Altoona and Eau Claire and the Town of Washington. The City of Eau Claire



should initiate efforts to work cooperatively with adjacent jurisdictions to acquire and develop the greenway.

## 5. Chippewa River State Trail and Old Abe State Trail

Coordinate with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and adjacent municipalities to maintain and promote the Chippewa River State Trails. The trails are the most prominent examples of recreation facilities in or near Eau Claire that are managed by several jurisdictions.

## 6. School Facilities

Seek to co-locate City parks with schools and to use existing school gymnasiums or pools to meet City recreational program needs.

## Plan Action Steps

The City will take the following steps to implement the recommendations of the Parks, Trails and Greenways Plan.

**Table 5-4**  
**Parks, Greenways and Trails Plan Actions**

| Action                                                                                                                         | Timing      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Seek to acquire land for the parks proposed in <b>Objective #1</b> .                                                           | Ongoing     |
| Acquire land for <b>Greenway extensions</b> as described in Policy 4-3 of the Parks Chapter.                                   | Ongoing     |
| Coordinate with the City of Altoona to create a greenway along <b>Otter Creek</b> and connection to <b>River Prairie</b> .     | 2020 – 2025 |
| Work with the <b>University</b> to develop the Sonntag center along Menomonie Street.                                          | 2020 – 2025 |
| Acquire <b>other properties</b> as listed in Policy 2-2 under the City's five-year Parks Plan.                                 | Ongoing     |
| Negotiate with the Town of Union to make the existing <b>Sherman Creek Park</b> jointly accessible to Town and City residents. | 2020 – 2025 |
| <b>Improve existing parks</b> as described in Table 5-3, Objective 7 and the five-year <i>Parks and Open Space Plan</i> .      | Ongoing     |
| Continue to <b>build</b> paths and other improvements in the greenways.                                                        | Ongoing     |
| Continue to <b>design</b> parks and greenways to advance civic pride and environmental stewardship.                            | Ongoing     |
| Consider adopting an ordinance requiring land or cash be dedicated with subdividing of <b>residential</b> lots.                | 2021-2022   |
| Continue acquiring properties around <b>Half Moon Lake</b> as they become available.                                           | Ongoing     |
| Implement the <b>Safe Routes to Parks Plan</b>                                                                                 | 2020        |
| Implement the <b>Carson Park Management Plan</b>                                                                               | 2021        |
| Develop active aging facility at McDonough Park                                                                                | 2021 - 2022 |